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ABSTRACT

The human species excel in the exquisite use of symbols. The sending and receiving of sophisticated messages sets humans apart from all other creatures on planet earth. The arts are one of mankind's most visual and most essential forms of language; and if children are not educated in the symbol system called the arts, they will lose not only their culture and civility but their humanity as well. There are three important reasons the arts are needed in the nation's schools: (1) the arts help children express feelings and ideas that words cannot convey; (2) the language of the arts can integrate our splintered academic world; and (3) the arts provide the child with a language that is universal. An artless school is an impoverished place reflecting a set of values boding ill for society. For the arts to gain a secure place in the curriculum, three factors must be present: (1) assessment procedures within the schools and for university admissions must be broadened; (2) the public's understanding of what counts as education must become broader and deeper; and (3) educationally substantive programs must be developed, and teachers who are capable of teaching the arts must be trained. Living in an interdependent world, today's students need to learn languages that transcend the intellectual and ideological barriers that distrust truth and suffocate the human spirit. (SM)

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Issues, Answers & Facts

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Introduction

Pinning The Tail On The Donkey

How odd it is, how frustrating, that the rightful place of the arts in a basic curriculum should still be a matter of contention. Yet in the attempt to winnow a meaningfully balanced program from the melange typical of so many schools, music, theatre, fine arts, and dance are often neglected. In the name of all the best intentions, students are thus shortchanged. But a defense of the arts can best be left to Ernest Boyer and Elliot Eisner, two ardent and effective champions.

Beyond this, however, we should seize the debate on the arts as offering a rare opportunity, a chance to make the case that the *whole* of the curriculum needs to be refashioned. Artificial boundaries between disciplines can be broken down so that history and art and geography, not to mention science and math will nurture each other. For as David Lynn noted in a special issue of *Basic Education* on the arts, "we're not talking about tacking on an extra period of band to the school day, but of interweaving another discipline as coherent and as sequential in building knowledge and skills as English and math and science." Just as important, each of those disciplines can be strengthened and enriched immeasurably by being mixed like the food on Huck Finn's plate.

We must also have the courage to recognize that "less is more." Even a slimmed-down version of the standard curriculum stocked with the basics is bloated and ungainly. Dennis Gray argued this in *Basic Education* as well: "The curriculum is already full to overflowing. Addition is not practical or prudent, unless a school is seeking to become even more ludicrously obsessed with COVERAGE—the sin of multiple commissions. In most schools, the day will not stretch to accommodate 'just a few more' isolated requirements."

The arts must have their full place—else a basic education is meaningless. But in struggling to wed them to the rest of the curriculum, let's recognize that hard choices must be made and no longer play pin the tail on the donkey with desirable classes.

A. Graham Down
Executive Director
The Council for Basic Education

The Arts, Language and the Schools

by Ernest L. Boyer
President, The Carnegie Foundation for
the Advancement of Teaching

It is my deep conviction—and it will be the simple proposition that I present here—that the arts are one of mankind's most visual and most essential forms of language, and that if we do not educate our children in the symbol system called the arts we will lose not only our culture and civility, but our humanity as well.

In *Beyond Creating*, a publication by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, I suggested that, in most respects, the human species is remarkably less well equipped than other creatures on the planet Earth.

I said that "we humans are no match for the lion in strength; we are outstripped by the ostrich in speed; we will win no medals against the dolphin in swimming; we can smell less acutely than the dog; we cannot see as well as the hawk during the day or the cat at night."

And yet, it is the human species that excels in the exquisite use of symbols. The sending and receiving of sophisticated messages gives us a special identity and meaning and sets us apart from all other creatures on the planet Earth. Like other forms of life, we build our nests; we seek our mates; and we flee from or confront our enemies. But unlike others, we take infinite pains to express and record our feelings and ideas. And we capture those experiences through the miracle we call language.

There is only one incontrovertible conclusion to be reached. The arts are not a frill; they are an essential part of language. And I am convinced that in our search for academic excellence we need art education in the schools for three essential reasons.

I. First, the arts are needed in the nation's schools because they help children express feelings and ideas words cannot convey.

In the early dawn of civilization, our ancestors may have used sticks and stones and grunts and groans to convey feelings and ideas. Then words were formed. A vocabulary took shape followed by written symbols, making it possible to send messages from place to place and transmit them from one generation to another.

At some not so early moment, written and spoken language was extended and enriched. Poets shaped metaphors, forcing us to view familiar things in unfamiliar ways while the rhythm of words carried yet another kind of meaning.

But even with the beauty and the power of the written and the spoken word, our miraculous use of language was incomplete. There remained buried in the bosom of the human spirit those human experiences that could not be captured by the sounds and verbal impressions we call words. These symbols simply could *not* portray adequately enough such joy as the coming of spring or the fruits of a fall harvest or the grief and loneliness that marked the ending of a love. They could not adequately convey the sound of the brook or the setting of the evening sun.

For the most intimate, most profoundly moving universal experiences we needed a more subtle, more sensitive

set of symbols than the written and the spoken word. And this richer language we call the *arts*. And so it is that men and women have used music, dance, and the visual arts to transmit most effectively the heritage of people and to express most profoundly their deepest human joys and sorrows—and intuitions, too.

Several years ago, in a now forgotten airport, I found in the *New York Times* an interview with Victor Weisskopf, the world renowned physicist, who was discussing the Big Bang theory. Near the end of this provocative conversation Weisskopf claimed that if you wish to understand the Big Bang theory you should "listen to the works of Haydn." At first I was amused and perhaps a bit bewildered by this proposition. And yet, upon reflection, the point was absolutely clear. A scientist of great distinction was reminding us once again that there are experiences so profound, so intellectually overwhelming that they call for symbols beyond words.

Murray Sidlin, the conductor of the New Haven Symphony, captured these sentiments well. "When words are no longer adequate, when our passion is greater than we are able to express in a usual manner, people turn to art. Some people go to the canvas and paint, some stand up and dance. But we all go beyond our normal means of communicating and this is the common human experience for all people on this planet."

Here let me introduce what some might consider a diversion. For years I have chaired a national committee concerned with the arts for the handicapped, now called Very Special Arts, precisely because I feel children who may be verbally restricted should have other means to convey feelings and ideas.

The arts give us a language that cuts across the disciplines.

While U.S. Commissioner of Education, I chaired a symposium at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. It was a conversation on the arts as universal language. The closing speaker was Linda Bovee. Because of deafness Linda could not speak, but through the magic of theatre she sends powerful messages to others. Ms. Bovee spoke to us about her commitment to the arts through the visual language we call "signing," and those who were not able to "read" this language were given an oral translation. Near the end of her brief presentation, Linda quoted Robert Frost's moving lines, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference." As the speaker majestically moved her hands and revealed on her face an intensity of feeling, I found the visual signals more powerful, more eloquent than the spoken word.

I am suggesting that the arts provide a channel for all of us to convey feelings and ideas, and if we are handicapped through speech, visual arts take on a very special meaning.

II. Through the language of the arts we can integrate our splintered academic world.

In our study of the American college, I was struck time and time again that today's students are accumulating units. But they are not gaining insight or perspective or a sense of wholeness. Students in the humanities specialize in "periods"—renaissance, baroque, eighteenth century, modern—and are not conversant with traditions outside those little boxes.

After visiting colleges and schools, I am convinced that students at all levels urgently need to see connections. And I believe that finding patterns across separate disciplines can be accomplished through the arts. Albert Einstein wrote on one occasion that all religions, arts, and sciences are branches of the same tree. Why must they be presented in our schools as being unrelated? Einstein's thought was expressed in a different way, again by Victor Weisskopf. When asked what gave him hope in troubled times, Weisskopf's answer was: "Mozart and quantum mechanics."

It is the human species that excels in the exquisite use of symbols.

Frank Press, the president of the National Academy of Sciences, recently talked about connections, too. Dr. Press argued that the great discoveries of science might be seen as a search to find *aesthetic* alternatives to messy concepts. Thus, the elegant periodic table, which all of us have spent years staring at, replaced a potpourri of tortured arrangements of elements that were almost uniformly useless for predicting properties of missing elements. The Copernical universe is not only more correct, but also more pleasing in its simplicity than the earlier formulations. The forced explanations of how genetic information is stored were swept away in the early sixties by the magnificent Double Helix, which was not only rational but poetic, too.

And the work of a recent Nobel Prize winner, geneticist Barbara McClintock was, as she defined it, always carried out with an artist's eye. A recent biography of McClintock is entitled appropriately, *A Feeling for the Organism*. The statement that accompanied McClintock's National Academy of Sciences Kimber Award in 1967, talked about what they called her "surpassingly *beautiful* investigations." McClintock has noted, "Basically everything is one. There is no way you can draw a line between things."

Even technicians become poetic at Cape Canaveral. When there is a successful liftoff they respond with an aesthetic term; they say, almost in a whisper, "Beautiful!"

I'm suggesting that the arts give us a language that cuts across the disciplines, help us to see connections and bring a more coherent meaning to our world.

III. The arts are essential because they provide the child a language that is universal. Its meaning can be understood by all.

Dance is a universal language. Architecture is a universal language. Music is a universal language. Painting and sculpture are languages that can be understood all around the world.

Salvador Dali's painting "The Persistence of Memory" can be universally understood by everyone haunted by the notion of the passage of time.

And when Picasso confronts the unspeakable agonies of war—the dismembered child, the scream of the bereft mother, the shattered home— and puts them on a huge canvas called "Guernica," he makes a universal statement about destruction that can be understood in the heart of every human being.

We live in a dangerous, interdependent world and today's students need to hear not just the language of politics and propaganda, they also need to learn languages that transcend the intellectual and ideological barriers that distrust truth and suffocate the human spirit. And this means learning the language of the arts.

When I was Commissioner of Education I heard heated debates over whether art education should be viewed as an *academic discipline* or a *creative act*—if I might oversimplify a complicated subject.

I do not diminish the convictions of my colleagues, but I have long believed that the arts' fundamental goals must serve both objectives. There is, I believe, an *academic* context in the arts—just as there is in every other form of language. Great art, like great literature, has a legacy to be remembered and forms to be more fully understood. Further, the connections between art and culture should be carefully examined.

Ancient and modern art—as well as the art of Africa and the South Pacific—must be seen alongside the great legacy of the middle ages.

Simply stated, I am not uncomfortable with a so-called "disciplined" study of the arts to help children develop a more attentive eye and a more responsive ear—a more highly formed sensitivity to this enriching language.

But I also believe that, through the arts, we should free the imagination of our children. Through most of history, each culture has defined rather narrowly the artist's mode of expression. For example, ancient Egyptian tomb paintings are practically indistinguishable from one millenium to another. Think of it. Picasso went through more artistic styles in less than one century than Egyptian artists did in 2000 years. And culture can even be oppressive.

In 1974 while traveling in the People's Republic of China, I was occasionally taken to the galleries where contemporary art was on display. One prize mural I was shown pictured a recently constructed hydroelectric dam in the interior of China. It was disquieting to see displays that sought to celebrate the *state* rather than the creativity of the *human spirit*.

The harsh truth is that today, in all too many classrooms, creativity is denied. We are systematically training pedants who have lost a powerful view of themselves as creators, who themselves can be significant makers of meaning, and who can be personal interpreters of experience. We can teach our children about the history of art and the rules of a perspective—and we should. But how do we stimulate children to respond to the primal messages that seem unmediated by our culture?

Walt Whitman, in the opening lines of *Leaves of Grass*, declares "I celebrate myself." And today society is desperately in need of individuals who are able to look at the old and the familiar in startling new ways. People who can—as William Faulkner phrased it in his Nobel Prize address of 1950—"make out of the material of the human spirit something which was not there before."

James Agee said it splendidly when he wrote, "With every child who is born, under no matter what circumstance, the potentiality of the human race is born again. And it is through the arts—as a creative act—that this potentiality, if well guided, can be powerfully revealed."

Carl Sandburg expressed it when he wrote:

Once having marched
Over the margins of animal necessity,
Over the grim line of sheer subsistence
Then man came
To the deeper rituals of his bones,
To the lights lighter than any bones,
To the time for thinking things over,
To the dance, the song, the story,
Or to the hours given over to dreaming,
Once having so marched.

Now more than ever, our children need to see clearly, hear acutely, and feel sensitively through the exquisite language of the arts.

This essay was presented to a conference of the Getty Center for Education in the Arts and is printed with permission.

Why Arts Are Basic

by Elliot W. Eisner
Professor of Education and Art
Stanford University

Given the competitively tough world we live in, what serious claim can we make for the arts as part of a basic education? After all, institutions of higher education do not give them high priority for purposes of admission. Our ability as a nation to compete with Japan, Korea, West Germany, and other technologically advanced—or soon to be advanced—countries seems little affected by what arts provide. And as far as the good life is concerned, many Americans seem to be getting along just fine without contact with Corelli, Massaccio, I.M. Pei, or John Cage.

It is not altogether clear that the good life, whatever that might be, requires access to the fine arts. And even if it did, we must wonder whether the arts can be taught effectively in public schools. Can an institution not noted for its commitment to the development of sensibility and imagination do the arts justice, or will it succeed merely in dampening whatever latent interest students might possess? Can teachers who themselves have not been steeped in the arts and for whom they are unimportant teach to children and adolescents what they themselves do not understand and find difficult to experience. Wouldn't children be better off left alone for some chance encounter with the arts when the ground is somewhat more fertile?

Perhaps the arts in our schools are precisely where they belong—a sideshow for most and center ring for a few. Yet this is an image of schooling that is lopsided and worse, indifferent to what humans should become and what they might be helped to experience. An artless school is an impoverished place reflecting a set of values that bodes ill for our society. Let me try to indicate why the arts ought to be a fundamental part of a basic education and what is needed if they are to become so.

First, consider the matter of sensibility—the manner in which we perceive and make sense of the world in which we live. The achievement of consciousness is a function of the extent to which one becomes sensitive, responsive, or perceptive to the qualities that constitute the world. The particular proportions of a tree, the expressive character of a human stance, the structure and composition of a city scene, the interplay of counterpoint in both conversation and music: to make sense of any of these, to glimpse their richness, requires that we know how to see and know what to look for. In this way, the training of our sensibilities is one road to mature consciousness.

Another road is imaginatively transforming images glimpsed with the physical eye and seen with the sensibilities. The reconstruction of a visual image into an imaginative realization depends upon the subtleties, complexities, and richness that our perceptions —our *trained* perceptions—have made possible in the first place.

What do the arts have to do with such achievements and of what moment are they in the grand and practical purposes of education?

If the arts are about anything, they are about refining such perceptions, of helping people replace for a moment the practical press of the immediate with attention to what can be seen if given only half a chance. A first virtue of an effective arts education is helping children learn to see what they look at, hear what they listen to, and feel what they touch.

A second virtue of effective arts education is to help students stretch their minds beyond the literal and rule-governed. So much of schooling is tied to the factual, to the certain, to the provable, to the algorithmic. Multiple-choice tests may very well stand for, both practically and metaphorically, the primary current mission of schooling. What a damning thought!

In the arts, choice is always multiple; the difference, however, is that there is rarely a single certain answer. Hence, when well taught the arts free the mind from rigid certainty. What could be more critical to any society seeking multiple solutions to the myriad problems before it? And such processes are of central importance in developing in citizens the tolerance and taste for coping with the ambiguities and uncertainties of human affairs.

The larger point here is that the lessons one is taught in school contain both direct and indirect messages. One can certainly teach children multiplication tables and correct spelling. But in the process one also teaches them that there is, after all, one correct way to spell and one accurate way to compute. For these fields, of course, that is wholly appropriate. But when such messages dominate our school programs, the quest for certainty and the fealty to rule become an overriding lesson. What is the danger? I submit that an inability to cope with diverse and at times conflicting visions about what is right, good, or beautiful is the surest path to tyranny.

The arts also exemplify and develop an important form of literacy, the literacy needed to read and interpret the varied meanings of poetry, music, visual arts, and dance. One need not burn books to render them feckless; they need only go unread for a couple of generations. The absence of attention to the arts in our schools will result in an inability for most of our citizens to deal with more than "Wheel of Fortune," "As the World Turns," and "Dallas." After all, people "read" what they can. This brings us to a second major aim of arts education: that through them children find meaningful access to their cultural heritage. Without such literacy that heritage itself will molder as skeletons in an unopened closet. The arts require a seeing eye in order to live.

An inability to cope with diverse and conflicting visions about what is right, good, or beautiful is the surest path to tyranny.

Such virtues are not easily achieved, however. What will be necessary for the arts to become a reality in our schools? Allow me to suggest three important dimensions. Let us remember, first of all, that the priorities of the public schools are determined by the kinds of tests that are administered and, in a related vein, by the admissions policies of selective colleges and universities. If the arts are to gain any secure place in the school curriculum, assessment procedures both within the schools and for post-secondary admissions will need to be broadened to give the arts public credibility.

That is no small task. It is easy to develop mindless tests that reduce a knowledge and understanding of the fine arts to something trivial. The major task that confronts arts educators, as well as others concerned with the quality of education throughout our schools, is to develop methods through which genuine achievement can be made vivid.

A second factor that needs attention is a broader and deeper view of what counts as education. The Council for Basic Education has historically embraced a conception of mind, understanding, and education that is neither widely understood nor shared by the body politic. The arts have a central place in that conception. Yet what the public hears most about are those largely irrelevant test scores that so often create high-level anxiety about the quality of our schools. High or low, scores on inadequate tests reveal very little about what is educationally significant. A continued emphasis on "achievement tests" will, in my view, diminish rather than enhance the possibility of a broader and deeper approach to schooling in America.

Third, and finally, if arts education is to become a reality in schools not only will broader assessment procedures and deeper public understanding be necessary, programs that are educationally substantive must be developed and teachers who are capable of teaching the arts must be trained. At present, particularly at the elementary school level, we are in short supply of both.

While some progress is being made thanks to new sources of foundation support, a long road remains to be traveled. Without attention to the three factors I have discussed, meaningful arts education in American schools will remain unavailable for the many and an extracurricular bonus for the few. Thanks both to developments in the field itself and to the overall educational reform movement, the time seems ripe for meaningful improvement in this long-neglected field. Should we fail, the arts will remain for most people an elitist pastime. With effective arts education, they can become a legacy that all enjoy.

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